

International Relations 1918–39

During this period the powers tried to avoid the possibility of another war. The victorious countries met at Versailles and forced a series of treaties on the defeated nations. The League of Nations was set up to try to maintain international law and order. The emergence of the dictators, however, especially Hitler and Mussolini, brought a series of crises in the 1930s that ultimately led to war in 1939.

THE VERSAILLES PEACE TREATIES, 1918–20

In January 1919 leaders from the Allied countries met in Paris to decide on the peace terms they would offer to the Central Powers. Twenty-seven victorious Allied powers were present, but the meetings were dominated by the 'Big Three'. Russia was not present as she was not trusted after the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 and had already made peace with Germany. The defeated powers were not consulted about the peace terms.

The 'Big Three'

George Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France, President Woodrow Wilson of the USA and David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Great Britain, were the 'Big Three'. Although they agreed that their task was to make sure that a terrible war never happened again, each had very different ideas about what should be done to achieve this.



Clemenceau

He was nicknamed the 'Tiger' because he was determined that France should not be defeated during the war. He had the strong backing of the French people. He wanted the peace treaties to protect France in the future and to compensate the French for their suffering. Most of the fighting had been done on French soil. It had killed 1.4 million French soldiers and wounded more than twice as many. Huge areas of farmland had been destroyed, together with factories and homes.

To sum up, Clemenceau's aims were:

- To have revenge on Germany for French suffering.
- To make Germany pay for the cost of damage.
- To ensure Germany would never be able to attack France again: take away German land; weaken her industries; reduce her armed forces.



Wilson

Wilson was greatly influenced by his belief in idealism – finding perfect solutions to problems. In 1918 he had proposed Fourteen Points as a basis for the peace talks and future peace. He hoped the countries at the Peace Conference would agree to these points.

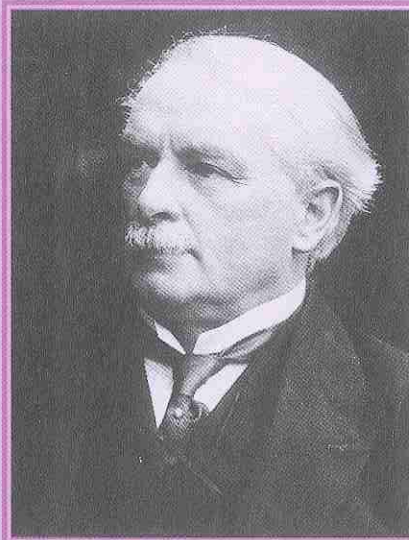
Focus on

The Fourteen Points

The most important of these points was self-determination – people of different national groups to have the right to rule themselves. The USA had not joined the war until 1917 and American soldiers did not reach Europe until late 1917. America could take a more detached view.

They had not suffered as much as Europe. Wilson wanted:

- ◆ to prevent Germany from becoming aggressive again
- ◆ to punish Germany for her aggression but avoid forcing her to pay very heavy damages
- ◆ to base the peace treaties on the Fourteen Points.



Lloyd George

Lloyd George was a clever politician. He realised he could not ignore British public opinion. Britain had also suffered badly during the war, with 750,000 killed and 1.5 million wounded. The British public, which had just re-elected his government, wanted to 'Hang the Kaiser' and 'Make Germany Pay'.

Lloyd George wanted to protect British interests. His aims were:

- to end the German threat to the British navy and Empire
- to make Germany a non-aggressive country without colonies
- to prevent Germany becoming so weak that a revival of European industry and trade was hindered
- to prevent Germans becoming so poor that they would turn to Communism
- to avoid humiliating Germans so they would not want revenge
- to help secure France against Germany but ensure France did not become too powerful.

There were major differences between these three and much disagreement during the six months of negotiations.

SOURCE A

At an election meeting in 1918 Sir Eric Geddes, a top British politician, promised:

If I am returned to office Germany is going to pay. I personally have no doubt that we will get everything that you can squeeze out of a lemon and more.

SOURCE B

Frances Stevenson, secretary to Lloyd George. 'David' is Lloyd George.

March 14 1919. President Wilson arrived. He has started to annoy David already by talking of matters that have already been settled. Clemenceau can not tolerate him at any price.

March 28 1919. A most unpleasant scene between Wilson and Clemenceau.

The peace treaties that were eventually agreed were a compromise between the different aims of the 'Big Three'.

Questions

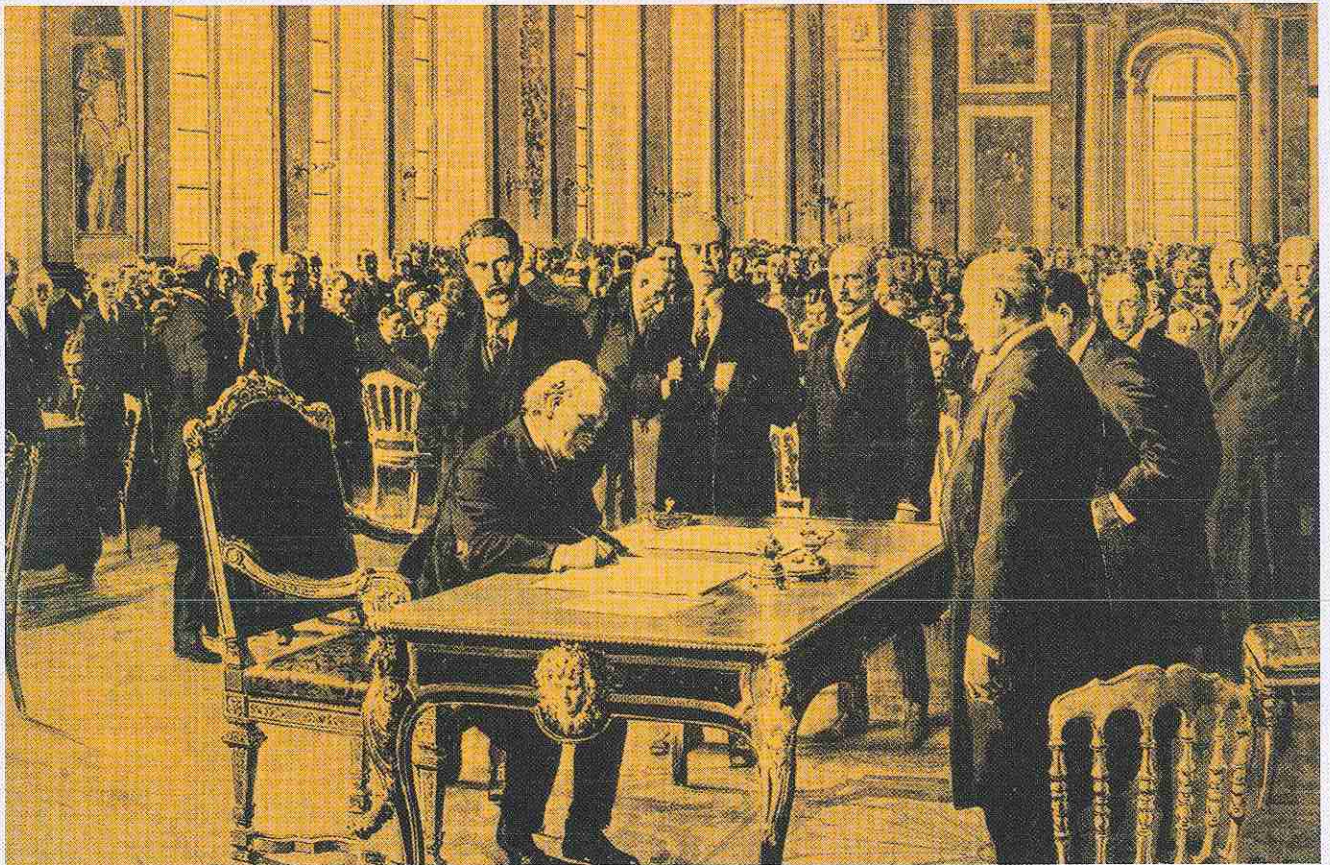
- 1 What does Geddes mean by the second sentence in Source A?
- 2 Are any of his views different from the aims of Lloyd George?
- 3 What similarities were there in the aims of the 'Big Three'?
- 4 What differences were there?

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles

On 28 June 1919 the German delegates were summoned to Versailles. There, in the Hall of Mirrors in the famous palace of Louis XIV, they signed the Treaty of Versailles.

SOURCE A

Lloyd George signing the Treaty of Versailles



Territorial changes

All Germany's colonies in Africa were given to Britain, France or South Africa. New Guinea was given to Australia and Samoa to New Zealand.

War Guilt – Article 231

The War Guilt Clause forced Germany to accept full responsibility for the war.

Key

- Territory lost by Germany
- Demilitarised Rhineland zone
- Plebiscite areas
- Areas controlled by the League of Nations



The League of Nations

This was set up to keep international peace in the future. The League was made responsible for ensuring the peace settlement was maintained.

Military terms

The Treaty greatly reduced the size of the German armed forces:

- The army was limited to 100,000 men. There was to be no conscription. All soldiers had to be volunteers.
- Germany was not allowed tanks, submarines or military aircraft.
- The navy could only have six battleships.
- The Rhineland was demilitarised. This meant that no German troops were allowed into this area next to the French border. The Allies were to keep an army of occupation on the west bank of the Rhine for fifteen years.

Reparations

Germany had to pay compensation for the damage caused by the war. This was known as reparations. A Reparations Commission was set up to fix the amount to be paid. In late 1921 it announced the sum of £6600 million. Germany was to pay this off over a period of 42 years.

SOURCE B

The War Guilt Clause

The Allied governments affirm, and Germany accepts, the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied governments and their peoples have been subjected as a result of the war:

Question

Explain in your own words what Germany had to accept in terms of:

- a loss of territory
- b reduction in armed forces
- c war guilt.

SOURCE A

Herr Schneidermann, speaking in the German National Assembly

The Allies are driving the knife into the living body of the German people. The proposed peace means the miserable enslavement of children.

SOURCE C

From A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1969

Germany remained by far the greatest power on the continent of Europe. It was greatest in population – 65 million against 40 million in France, the only other major power. German superiority was greater still in the economic resources of coal and steel. Nothing could prevent Germany from overshadowing Europe, even if they did not plan to do so.

Question

What point is the cartoonist trying to make in Source B?

Activity

You are a journalist for a neutral country reporting on German reactions to the Treaty of Versailles and deciding whether it was fair. Using the information above write your article. You should include:

- A headline on German reactions.
- Why Germany resented the terms of the Treaty.
- Was it a fair treaty?

German reactions

Germans were horrified when they discovered the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

They called the Treaty the 'Diktat', or 'dictated peace'. They were upset for several reasons:

- 1 The territorial losses. Germans complained that the loss of seven million subjects and 13.5% of her territory was too harsh. In particular they resented the losses to Poland in the east. Germany was now split in two by the Polish Corridor.
- 2 The Germans claimed that the Allies were trying to bankrupt Germany with their high reparations claims.
- 3 The terms were worked out in secret and forced upon the Germans.
- 4 All of Germany's colonies were taken away from her but the Allies kept theirs.
- 5 The Germans hated having to accept full blame for the war.
- 6 Above all, Germans hated having to disarm because this left the country defenceless against neighbouring states.

SOURCE B

A German cartoon, 1919. The Allies are shown as devils preparing to make Germany sign the Treaty.



Was the Treaty fair?

On the other hand people at the time and historians since have argued that the Treaty was fair on Germany:

- 1 The Treaty did not weaken Germany anywhere near as much as the Germans complained. By 1925 German steel production was twice that of Britain.
- 2 Germany had forced an even worse treaty on Russia in March 1918 (see pp. 420–21).

Austria

TREATY OF ST GERMAIN 1919

- ✦ Recognised Hungary and Austria as separate and independent states.
- ✦ Ordered them to give up land including Bohemia and Moravia to the newly created Czechoslovakia; Bosnia and Herzegovina to Yugoslavia; Galicia to Poland; South Tyrol and Istria to Italy.
- ✦ Reduced their armed forces.
- ✦ Made them pay reparations.
- ✦ Forbade the *Anschluss* – this means Austria was not allowed to unite with Germany.

The other peace treaties

The other defeated nations also had to accept peace treaties.

Turkey

THE TREATY OF SEVRES 1920

- ✦ This took away most of Turkey's land in Europe. Greece gained Eastern Thrace and Smyrna.
- ✦ The Turkish Empire was broken up with much of it going to France and Britain to govern as mandates on behalf of the League of Nations.
- ✦ Put the Turkish Straits under the control of the League of Nations.
- ✦ Ordered French, British and Italian troops to occupy Turkey itself.



Hungary

TREATY OF TRIANON 1920

- Hungary had to:
- ✦ pay reparations.
 - ✦ limit its army to 35,000.
 - ✦ hand over war criminals.
 - ✦ give Transylvania to Romania, Ruthenia and Slovakia to Czechoslovakia and Slovenia to Yugoslavia.

Bulgaria

TREATY OF NEUILLY 1919

- This made Bulgaria agree to:
- ✦ give land to Yugoslavia and Western Thrace to Greece.
 - ✦ pay reparations.
 - ✦ limit its army to 20,000.

Changes 1921–29

The Turks hated the Treaty of Sèvres, especially the occupation of Turkey by foreign troops and the amount of land they had been forced to give to the Greeks. In 1921 a nationalist leader, Mustapha Kemal, overthrew the Sultan, the ruler of Turkey. He then led an army which drove the Greeks out of Smyrna. In 1922 the Allies agreed to renegotiate the peace settlement. This led to the Treaty of Lausanne, in 1923. This treaty:

- Returned lands that Turkey had lost to Greece.
- Gave Turkey control of the Straits again.
- Ordered all foreign troops to leave.

Reparations

In 1922 Germany paid a small amount and then asked for a two-year delay before the next instalment. The Allies refused and in 1923 the French invaded the Ruhr (see p. 340). This worsened Germany's economic problems and led to hyperinflation. Eventually the French and Germans agreed to the Dawes Plan (see p. 344) and the French withdrew their troops from the Ruhr. The Dawes Plan scaled down the payments to 2500 million marks per year, which was to be paid over a longer period. The USA would provide 800 million marks in gold in loans to Germany to help stabilise its economy and develop its industry and trade.

Over the next five years, 1924–9, Germany began to prosper. Resentment against the Treaty died down. In 1929 the Young Plan (p. 344) further reduced the reparation payments to 2000 million marks a year, extending them to 1969.

Questions

- 1 Which of the peace treaties do you think was the most severe? Why?
- 2 Why was the Dawes Plan brought in?
- 3 What changes did the Dawes and Young Plans make to reparation payments?
- 4 What do the changes of 1921–29 show us about the attitudes to the Treaties of 1919–20? Were people beginning to accept that they were too harsh?

Assessment of the Peace Treaties

There has been much disagreement then and since as to the effects of the peace treaties. Some believe they led to the Second World War. Others argue that the positive effects were greater than the weaknesses.

Criticisms

- 1 The Treaties failed in Central Europe because:
 - they created too many new states, such as Yugoslavia, which contained unhappy minority nationalities.
 - these new countries were not strong enough against powerful neighbours such as Germany and Russia.

SOURCE A

Lloyd George

In many respects terrible terms to force upon a country. We shall have to fight another war all over again in twenty-five years at three times the cost.

SOURCE B

The editor of the *Daily Graphic*,
5 July 1919

Nobody involved is completely satisfied – not those who wish to punish the evil-doers and least of all, of course, the evil-doers. The Germans may even treat the Peace Treaty as another Scrap of Paper.

- 2 Turkey was treated very unfairly in order to satisfy the aims of France, Britain and Greece.
- 3 Many of the terms of the treaties did not work and did not last. The Treaty of Sèvres only lasted three years. Reparation payments were changed on two occasions.
- 4 The treaties left the defeated countries very bitter and determined to get revenge or overturn the terms of the treaties. This was particularly true in Germany where extremists such as Hitler got support because of the 'stab in the back' theory (p. 337) and by promising to overthrow the Treaty.

Achievements

SOURCE C

Perceval Landon, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1919

The Treaty is signed. Militarism, with all its disciplined brutality and lust for conquest, is at an end. At an end, too, is the German Empire. The world looks forward from today to a full generation of peace.

SOURCE D

From J. Traynor and I. Dawson, *The Struggle for Peace*, 1997

The Treaties were a reasonable attempt to solve an impossible problem. It was impossible because the atmosphere of 1919 meant the Allies could not be lenient towards the defeated countries. It would have been difficult to do better.

SOURCE F

N. De Marco, *The World This Century*, 1987

Wilson had tried hard to make sure that the various peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were given self-determination. The Serbs, Croats and Slovenes now had their own state – Yugoslavia. The Czechs and Slovaks had their own nation too.

SOURCE E

Ruth Henig, *Versailles and After*, 1995

The settlement that emerged from the months of deliberation at Paris was a real achievement. The fact that it did not survive the 1920s intact was due not so much to the terms of the treaties themselves. It was due to the reluctance of the political leaders of the time to enforce them.

Questions

- 1 How useful is Source A as evidence of the effects of the Treaty of Versailles?
- 2 Read Sources C, D, E and F. In your own words, explain their views on the peace treaties.
- 3 Overall, do you think the peace treaties were a failure?